

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

May 2004



The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVANCES AT NATIONAL CEMETERIES IN FLORIDA

Barrancas National Cemetery On Saturday, May 29 Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and military units will be placing American flags on the graves. The Memorial Day ceremony begins on May 31 at 9:00 AM (Central Time). It will commence with a parade of the veteran's organizations led by an Inter-Service color guard. The Navy choir will participate before and during the ceremony. A roll call of deceased members from the various veterans organizations will be read. The guest speaker is to be announced. For more information, call the cemetery at 850-453-4846.

Bay Pines National Cemetery The Memorial Day ceremony on May 31 begins at 9:00 AM. Congressman C. W. "Bill" Young will be the keynote speaker. For more information, call the Bay Pines VA Medical Center Voluntary Service, which is in charge of the ceremony, at 727-398-9394.

Florida National Cemetery The Memorial Day Ceremony on May 31 begins at 10:00 AM. Visitors will be able to view the Avenue of Flags, consisting of approximately 400 flags donated to the cemetery by the next-of-kin of deceased veterans that will be displayed along the cemetery roadways. The award-winning Florida National Guard 13th Army Band will be performing. The guest speaker will be Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Veterans organizations with colors are invited to participate in the massing of colors at the beginning of the program. Participating veterans organizations should plan to arrive by 8:30 AM. The Florida National Cemetery Public Information Center will be open on Memorial Day from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Cemetery Representatives will be on duty to assist visitors. Seating is limited; those attending are encouraged to arrive early, wear comfortable clothing, and to bring a lawn chair or blanket. To get to the cemetery, take Interstate 75 to Exit 309 (formerly Exit 62) and follow the signs to the cemetery. For more information call the cemetery office at 352-793-7740.

St Augustine National Cemetery The Memorial Day Ceremony on May 31, begins at 10:15 AM. The ceremony

is sponsored by the Military Officers Association of America, the Florida National Guard, and the St. Johns County Veterans Service Office. Honor guards from veterans service organizations and the St. Augustine High School Band will participate. The guest speaker is to be announced. The names of veterans from St. Johns County who have passed away since Veterans Day 2003 will be read. For more information, call the St. Johns County Veterans Service Office at 904-823-2463.

VA SEEKS FORMER POWS FOR POSSIBLE BENEFIT AWARDS (VA News Release April 8, 2004)

WASHINGTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reaching out to former prisoners of war not currently using VA benefits and urging them to contact VA to find out if they are eligible for health care, disability compensation or other services.

More than 21,000 former POWs already receive compensation from VA. Within the past year, VA has mailed information about benefits to another 4,700 known ex-POWs not on its rolls. However, VA estimates there could be as many as 11,000 more POWs for whom it does not have an address. Nine out of ten former POWs are veterans of World War II, and their service predates the use of Social Security numbers as a military "service number." That, coupled with the decades that have elapsed since their service, makes it difficult for VA to track down those who have not opened a file with VA in recent years. "VA asks veterans and all Americans who know of a former POW to help spread the word that benefits and services may be just a phone call away," VA Secretary Principi said. Secretary Principi urges former POWs not receiving benefits who did not receive a VA letter to call the department at 1-800-827-1000.

In recent years, VA has expanded policies to cover increasing numbers of former POWs as new illnesses have been found related to captivity. VA recently enacted policies making it easier for former POWs, detained 30 days or more, to obtain compensation for specific illnesses.

In July 2003, VA added cirrhosis of the liver to the list of diseases presumed to be linked to captivity and entitling former POWs to disability compensation. Additionally, a December 2003 change in the law now allows former

POWs detained for less than 30 days to get benefits for certain physical and psychological conditions. Former POWs have a special eligibility for enrollment in VA medical care and are exempt from making co-payments for VA pharmaceuticals, as well as inpatient and outpatient medical care. They have the same eligibility as other veterans for extended care. Free treatment for any dental condition is now available to all former POWs.

More information about VA benefits and services for former POWs is available at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/>.

CHAMPVA POLICY FOR SOME SURVIVING SPOUSES EXTENDED (VA Press Release March 25, 2004)
WASHINGTON – An extended deadline will allow more time for some remarried surviving spouses of veterans to seek health care insurance under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA).

The extension applies to CHAMPVA-eligible spouses who remarry after a veteran's death. The surviving husband or wife lost access to CHAMPVA benefits if they remarried before their 55th birthday and before Feb. 4, 2003. Under rules announced last March, those survivors had until February 4, 2004, to apply for reinstatement of their CHAMPVA coverage. Today's announcement gives them until December 16, 2004, to apply for reinstatement.

To be eligible for CHAMPVA, people must be family members of veterans who have a permanent and total service-connected disability, who died of a service-connected condition or who were totally disabled from a service-connected condition at the time of death.

In general, CHAMPVA covers most health care services and supplies that are medically and psychologically necessary. People who want an application for this benefit or more information can contact VA's Health Administration Center at 800-733-8387.

Surviving spouses who remarry at a younger age and lose their CHAMPVA benefits can have these benefits restored if their later marriage is annulled or ends due to death or divorce. Similarly, widows or widowers of any age who lost benefits under VA's Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program due to remarriage are eligible for reinstatement of monthly DIC payments if their subsequent marriage ends.

This restoration policy has been in effect since 1998, but VA officials are concerned widows or widowers may overlook this benefit if a subsequent marriage ends years later.

IMPORTANT DATES IN MAY

May 7 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 06-01-2004 payments

May 20 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 06-01-2004 payments

May 31 Federal Holiday - Memorial Day

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) -
PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022
1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications
1-877-823-2378

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries
10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility)
PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120
1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)
<http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/>

Property Management **www.ocwen.com**

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs:
www.floridavets.org/

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**